

Op-Ed by Ambassador Ian Kelly
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The United States Will Do Everything to Support Lithuania's OSCE Chairmanship

As a junior diplomat in the late 1980s, I visited Lithuania often, taking great pride in telling local officials that the United States did not recognize the incorporation of Lithuania into the USSR. I felt a particular surge of pride in the fall of 1989 when I saw the flag of independent Lithuania flying above Vilnius Castle – an important and courageous decision in the context of the time. A year and a half later, I followed reports of the January 13, 1991, events in Vilnius with great concern. As Soviet troops attacked the Vilnius television tower, killing 13 civilians, I remember thinking how dark the days ahead could be for the young Republic, which had only proclaimed its independence some ten months earlier.

Little did I imagine that exactly 20 years after those dramatic events, the Foreign Minister of Lithuania would assume his role as Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). I like to think that the OSCE – an organization that began during the Cold War as a major forum for discussing and acting on vital issues of peace, security and human rights throughout the trans-Atlantic and European region – played some role in fostering the democratic ideals and promoting the fundamental freedoms that spurred the brave protestors that January day.

And so, 20 years later, I listened with great interest to Foreign Minister Audronius Ažubalis address the OSCE Permanent Council for the first time in his role as Chair. He spoke of the honor and responsibility he and his nation feel upon assuming this challenging leadership role. He emphasized his commitment to “resolving existing conflicts in the OSCE area in a peaceful and negotiated manner, . . . supporting and defending the freedom of the media [and] safety of journalists, and protecting independent national human rights institutions.” And he noted his intention of enhancing efforts to tackle transnational threats, including those emanating from the territory of Afghanistan; promoting tolerance through education, and developing common principles in the field of energy security.

The United States agrees with these objectives. And as I said in my response to the Foreign Minister’s remarks, the United States will do everything it can to support Lithuania’s Chairmanship.

The United States also believes that the OSCE should enhance its early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation capabilities as well

as expand its role in assisting Afghanistan. It also needs to continue addressing serious short-comings in implementing commitments to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Real political and military security must be built on a foundation of open-society commitments. It is the recognition that peace among states is dependent on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms within states that makes the OSCE unique among security organizations. We know that Lithuania shares these values and we wish it great success in leading the organization into a new decade.

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U.S. Representative to the OSCE

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